

Jonestown

is the only place he's heard
of your parents', grandparents',
and great grandparents' homeland
of yellow cane flowers,
contracts, Demerara, backdam,
where the Kool-Aid stream
concerns his own white
story of nation and never mind
the fact that the USA
is a land of intervention
that squashes movement of the people
worldwide, though
you relished all the plums
and northern fruits until
you got diabetes from stuffing yourself
with refined white
hipsters in Brooklyn who
like to say things about backwards brown
folks, like there is no God
but Science, the same white friend
who told me this joke:
*You're Indian? My mom says
everyone should own one,*
as though this wasn't your family's
reality once upon a Skeldon plantation,
and performs his standup in
mock Asian English, asks you
to show how you blend spices
to make food like chicken-
tikka-masala, a food that is foreign
to any Guyanese Indian
but because you've learned
to mix these tomatoes and cumin
and coriander in the pressure cooker
because the British invented
your transoceanic crossings with
curry powder lining their slave ships—
you use it as though it a potion to summon
ship-jumping spirits
from the Sea whose serpent curls
look like tresses of your ancestors
who suffered as slaves
and now living in the States
you benefit from a western gait,

but are unmoored; does *rootlessness*
mean or the uprooting
of people to make
your own village someplace
as a settler in Hawai'i and you know
so many legends of obeah,
fire rass, jumbie, churail, the way
that Kaitaur water, brown
like your skin, falls
into a rainbow mist,
but some hapless halfwit
hipster discovers the end of the A train:
Lefferts and Liberty, doubles,
and roti and calls you Indian
instead of Guyanese, but you sleep
with him anyway,
his white skin against yours.

Lordha and Sil

*ghare hindi na bole jaila ta ka batiya ba
rassiya ragardat chataan ke nisaan rehejai*

I buy a flat stone to carry on the plane;
the TSA agent makes me explain what once ground

household spices now languishes, a curio
of ancestral time: bondage and a release

of readapted tongues. I've flattened my fingers
milling cumin, pise all kine masala.

What is a mortar without a pestle, a Guyanese
without pepper sauce or chutney; exile without

a home to throw a prince from; a stone without
salt-grooves of brown and haldi hands that marked it,

the savor of indenture in every pounded garlic
clove, an epic voyage rendered new in English?

*So what if in the home we don't speak Hindi?
A rope rubbing against a rock leaves an imprint*

We Came In Planes

after Mahadai Das

We came in planes
another voyage across
the pagal samandar,
with our cane-cutting songs,
Calypso, and Chutney-Soca from Crabwood Creek, Anandale, and Lusignan,
flights from Timheri to LGA and JFK and MIA
as though the choice was ours.

Indentured now to America,
prey to imperialist design.

We come on countless flights,
hassa and houri dripping water
from our overhead luggage.
We come still in ships—hawai jahaaj,
like maribunta wasps.
Sleek like maribunta.
Hungry for sweet sweet like maribunta.

Some come snake-charmed by gold and the myth of dream-making,
many come fleeing persecution, jumbie, churail,
and murder, all alike, we come—
unlettered, doctors, laborers, children,
like my Nani and Aji—
short and laughing, tired of depending
on wages sent from foreign,
widows and wives waiting for children and husbands to sponsor them.
All of us the same,
colored by the tea of kalapani.
Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Athiest
all mixed into one Coolie.
We come to the Western world,
our governments in tatters
after a colonial system's hurricane.

When we came Ma worked
cleaning white men's shit, a janitor,
mocked for her brown. Pap,
the entry level book balancer,
learned no equivalencies are equal equations
to balance, so he washed himself
in white. They worked despite
only having one student visa between them,

toiled at the mercy of Lutherans.
He grew into man
on stolen Lokono, Karao, Warraus, lands; feeding us
in Mvskoke, Seminole,
and Miccosukee forests.

Now, I remember my Aji's grey eyes.
She na vex me na go make none pickni
now I am living
instead of wrapping my paisa
in my pagri for some day when rain go fall—

I have no one to send for, here
between her langtime and my antiman present.
I am alone in her language
looking behind, looking ahead.

Who will remember who came before us,
our Bhojpuri and Urdu, Tamil and Awadhi minds
cleansed in English. The chains of Per-Aji—
I remember Aji talk about her fat silver anklets
the logies now farther away
than Corriverton. Aji singing
in the rice field

of how she left her mother—
never to return. I remember
Rampur-Nani, senile, her ordhni
dropping from her head
recognizing my *pranam*.

Gaiutra now reminds me
the blood of Coolie women still
cry out from the fields and still
from Queens; did you think
the butchering stopped when you got to Richmond Hill
where you can buy a cutlass in any store on Liberty?

A century has passed since the contracts
ended and I'm haunted.
Ghosts wander all about. Ghosts of 1838,
the *Hesperus* and *Whitby*, now
a century after indenture's abolishment,
we pray to bronze statues like murtis
that commemorate our contracts
where we became objects, ownable.

The British stole us too

and now we celebrate indenture
with a holiday they say
honors the suffering of my Per-Aji,
but don't expect *Indenture Jaya Hai* from me,
or that I will throw a parade or worship
at any monument that lauds
the beginning of torture. I celebrate my heritage
of resistance my fist raised high,
a new nation's flag.

New York, had the law been in my hands,
ICE would be a terrorist organization
not Ayub-bhai's masjid built
up from the small donations of many
brown hands. Dear New York,
Dear Georgetown, Dear Crabwood Creek,
imagine my joy watching
a white nationalist monument pulled down,
made to kiss black and immigrant feet.

I have come with a hawan-fire in my chest.

And now my Coolie people,
Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Athiest
black, brown, queer-as-fuck, trans, straight,
let us stand against suffering
kin to ours. Our agni-pariksha trial
has only begun in this young stolen country,
but don't forget what you packed
in your luggage from home.

Recall Mahadai's voice
that sears us into our present:

in the beginning I was with the struggle.